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College Youth Hold Unfavorable View of 'New Age' Movement

PRINCETON, N.J. — Among U.S. college students who have heard or read about the New Age movement, unfavorable views of the movement outweigh favorable opinion by a more than 3-to-1 margin. This finding comes from a just-completed Gallup survey of the nation's college students, conducted exclusively for readers of *Emerging Trends*.

All 545 students in the survey were first asked the following question in face-to-face personal interviews conducted during the last two weeks of October:

Have you heard or read about the New Age movement?

A total of 44% answered in the affirmative. This "informed" group was then asked:

In general, do you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of the New Age movement?

About half (47%) of this informed group said "unfavorable," more than three times the proportion who said the opposite (14%). However, a large percentage (39%) said they were unable to express an opinion.

In broad terms, the New Age movement is a diverse, interreligious, and optimistic set of unorthodox beliefs and practices popularized widely in the last decade. Adherents generally hold a blend of Eastern and Western spiritual teachings which include belief in some sacred scriptures, the reality of miracles, angels or guides, the immortality of the soul, ainimism, clairvoyance, astral projection, extraterrestrial life, astrology, and the unity of body, mind, and spirit. Many practice some form of meditation.

Inroads Among Christians

Although many Christian leaders have been sharply critical of the New Age, the movement has won some support among the Christian college population who have heard or read about it. One in nine (11%) of persons who say they believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ currently express a favorable view of New Age. A total of 51% hold an unfavorable opinion, while 38% do not express an opinion.

Trends in U.S. Religious Life Show Considerable Stability

PRINCETON, N.J. — Three long-standing Gallup trends show considerable stability in American religious life: church or synagogue attendance and membership, and the importance placed on religion.

Four adults in 10 (42%) attended church or synagogue in a typical week in 1988. Churchgoing has remained more or less constant since 1969 after declining from the high point of 49% recorded in 1955 and 1958.

To estimate the average attendance during 1988, surveys of representative samples of the adult population were made in two selected weeks (in May and October).

This question was asked:

Did you, yourself, happen to attend church or synagogue in the last seven days?

Following are highlights of the trend. The audits from 1955 through 1988 were based on an average of several surveys each year. The figures prior to 1955 were based on a single annual survey.

Church/Synagogue Attendance

1988	42%
1987	40
1985	42
1983	40
1982	41
1981	41
1979	40
1972	40
1969	42
1967	43
1962	46
1958	49**
1957	47
1955	49**
1954	46
1950	39
1940	37*
1939	41
1939	41

*Low point.
**High points.

Two-Thirds Are Members

Two-thirds of U.S. adults (65%) say they are members of a church or synagogue, as determined by the 1988 audit.

The highest figure in the half-century trend occurred in 1947 when 76% said they were church or synagogue members. Today's percentage is the lowest recorded.

In 1988, as in past years, a higher percentage of women than men report being church or synagogue members, and membership increases progressively with age. Education does not appear to be a major factor, but sharp differences are found by region, with Southerners most likely and Westerners least likely to be members.

It is important to bear in mind that the membership figures are self-classifications, representing the percentages of people who say they are members of a church or synagogue, and thus may include some who are not actually on the rolls of a local church. It should also be noted that adherents of certain churches — for example, the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches — are considered members at birth.

This question was asked:

Do you happen to be a member of a church or synagogue?

Church/Synagogue Membership

1988	65%*
1987	69
1985	71
1983	69
1982	67
1979	68
1976	71
1965	73
1952	73
1947	76**
1944	75
1940	72
1937	73

*Low point.
**High point.

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Majority Considers Religion Very Important

A majority of Americans (54%) consider religion very important in their lives, with women, older persons, Southerners, blacks, and Southern Baptists most likely to give this response.

Although there has been little change in recent years in the proportion who say religion is very important in their lives, the current figure is 21 points lower than in 1952, when 75% gave this response.

Here is the question:

How important would you say religion is in your life — very important, fairly important, or not very important?

Importance of Religion

	Very important %	Fairly important %	Not very important %
1988	53	31	13
1987	53	32	14
1986	55	30	14
1985	55	31	13
1984	56	30	13
1983	56	30	13
1982	56	30	13
1981	56	29	14
1980	55	31	13
1978	52	32	14
1965	70	22	7
1952	75	20	5

NOTE: "No opinion" omitted.

Details of Surveys

The 1988 findings on church membership and the importance of religion are based on interviews with 4,597 adults, 18 and older, conducted at intervals throughout the year. For results based on samples of this size, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects could be 2 percentage points in either direction. The latest church attendance figure is based on 2,041 interviews and has a sampling variance of plus or minus 3 percentage points.

In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls. *This report conforms to the standards of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.*

Many Find Spiritual Nourishment In Groups Meeting Outside Church

Many Americans are finding spiritual nourishment in groups which meet somewhere other than in a church. A national Gallup survey shows that, during a two-year period, about one-fifth of U.S. adults (22%) attended, at least once, a prayer group, Bible study, or other religious group which meets in a home or other place outside the church.

Protestants are more likely than are Catholics to attend such meetings, and women are more apt to do so than are men. Interestingly, young adults are as likely as their elders to participate in home meetings and the like. It is also worth noting that one person in nine among the "unchurched" have attended meetings outside the church. The "unchurched" are non-members who have not attended church in the six months prior to the interview, except for special occasions.

Following is the question asked in a national Gallup survey, *The Unchurched American, 1988*, which was conducted in March for Congress 88, A National Festival of Evangelism, and supported by 24 religious organizations. A total of 2,556 persons, 18 and older, were interviewed.

Here is the question:

In the last two years did you attend a prayer group, Bible study, or other religious group which meets somewhere other than a church?

The key findings:

Attended Meetings In Two-Year Period

TOTAL	**22%**
Church Status	
Churched	30
Unchurched	11
Sex	
Male	19
Female	25
Age	
Under 30	23
18-24 years	21
25-29 years	26
30-49 years	21
50 & older	22
Education	
Less than High school	19
High school graduate	21
Some college	29
College graduate	22
Marital Status	
Married	23
Single	18
Divorced/Separated/Widowed	24
Religious Preference	
Protestant	27
Catholic	15
Other	25

Independent Sector Survey Reveals Churches Are Primary Source of Voluntary Aid

Study Shows Congregations Practice What They Preach

In one form or another, every religion teaches a gospel of service and charity. A study now reveals that America's religion institutions do as they say. The report "From Belief to Commitment," undertaken by the philanthropic umbrella group, INDEPENDENT SECTOR, assisted by the Gallup Organization and with full cooperation of more than 100 major religious denominations, indicates that churches and other religion bodies are the major supporters of voluntary services for neighborhoods and communities.

Approximately half (46 percent) of the $41.4 billion that was contributed to congregations in 1986 was used in ways that express religious conviction about service to others. The other half (54 percent) was spent on more direct practices such as worship and religious education.

The $19.1 billion from congregations that supported community services was over and above the approximately $11 billion contributed by all sources to religiously affiliated organizations such as schools, nursing homes, and day care centers. According to Virginia Hodgkinson, INDEPENDENT SECTOR's reserach vice president and director of the study, "The charitable significance of churches, synagogues, mosques, and others is even further enlarged by their influence on the giving and volunteering activities of their participants.

Another INDEPENDENT SECTOR study, *Giving and Volunteering in the United States*, released last month, revealed that "people who are members of congregations are far more likely to be generous with both time and money to a wide variety of nonprofit activities."

The study also presented a striking range and variety of outside activities. For example, 87 percent of all congregations reported programs in human services and welfare but 79 percent also reported programs in international activities. In addition, 70 percent reported programs for public and societal benefit, 68 percent reported programs in health, 43 percent had programs in arts and cultural, 38 percent in education programs, and 27 percent had programs for the improvement of the environment. Dr. Hodgkinson indicated, "Even we were amazed at the great variety of programs supported by religious institutions both in their local neighborhoods and abroad."

George H. Gallup, Jr., who participated personally in the study, indicated, "Voluntary service, a vital American ican trait since the founding of our nation, is motivated to a considerable degree by religious values. Yet until the current national inquiry by INDEPENDENT SECTOR, little was known about the full scope of the contribution made to society by religious congregations and religiously motivated individuals."

Among other findings of the report:

- As part of the broader outreach, religious groups provided $8.4 billion in direct grants to other organizations. This compares to the total of financial support from all U.S. foundations in the same year of $5.9 billion and of U.S. business corporations of $4.5 billion, making religions a primary source of financial grants.

- Previous reports of giving in 1986 in GIVING USA (1988 edition) showed that religions received 58 percent of all money contributed by individuals. Education received 11.6 percent; health 14.6 percent, and human services, 10.5 percent. If the figures were recast to subtact from religions what they in turn contribute to others, the revised figures would show that contributions to education were $14.1 billion rather than $10.1 billion or plus 40 percent; contributions to health care $13.9 billion rather than $12.3 billion or plus 13 percent; and contributions to other human services were $11.6 billion rather than $9.1 billion or plus 27 percent.

- In addition to the dollars given directly and indirectly, volunteers other than clergy devoted a total 51 million hours per month to their congregations' community services. Conservatively estimated the annual dollar value of this time is $5.4 billion.

- Sixty percent of congregations reported that they also provided in-kind support (i.e., food, clothing, and housing) to human service programs operated by de-

nominational and community groups. This support is not reflected in the dollar totals.

- Nine out of 10 congregations reported that their facilities were available to groups within the congregation for other than congregational activities, and 6 our of 10 reported that their facilities were available to other groups in the community.
- Of the estimated 686,000 clergy in congregations in 1986, 435,000 (63 percent) were paid, and 253,000 (37 percent) were volunteer.

Brian O'Connell, president of INDEPENDENT SECTOR, said "We undertook the study as part of our effort to gain a fuller understanding of the ways that voluntary organizations serve society. Up to now, there has been a tendency to assume that religious groups are so different from other nonprofit organizations, relating largely to salvation, that perhaps they didn't really belong in the voluntary sector. On the basis of our studies, we realize even more than we had expected how much the organized neighborliness of religious organizations means to the kind of caring society we are."

INDEPENDENT SECTOR is a nonprofit coalition of 650 corporations, foundations, and voluntary organizations members with national interest and impact in philanthropy and voluntary action. The organization's mission is to create a national forum capable of encouraging the giving, volunteering, and not-for-profit initiative that help all of us better serve people, communities, and causes.

Methodology: From May 1987 through March 1988, the Gallup Organization conducted a three-stage survey, including telephone interviews with representatives from 4,205 local congregations, a common questionnaire by mail and telephone with 1,862 congregations, of which 1,353 responded to a more detailed questionnaire. The survey was limited to congregations; therefore, it did not include denominational organizations, religious charities, or religiously owned or affiliated institutions, such as schools or hospitals. Congregations were asked a series of questions relating to membership, program activities, employees, volunteers, and reveneues and expenditures.

10 Years of *Emerging Trends*

The current (December, 1988) issue of *Emerging Trends* is the *100th* issue of this publication, started 10 years ago, in January, 1979. During this decade, many issues vital to the Church and society have been explored in the pages of *Emerging Trends*, published monthly by the Princeton Religion Research Center.

In addition, long-term trends in religious beliefs and practices have been updated. Survey findings have been examined not only in terms of the population as a whole, but by special groups — "opinion leaders," people in business, the clergy. International trends (based on surveys conducted by the 48-members Gallup group) have been presented when these are of interest and significance for Americans.

Through carefully designed surveys, light has been shed on such questions as the following:

- How many Americans are "bilical illiterates"?
- What can be done to reduce the rancor between conservative and liberal Christians?
- How do the religious beliefs and practices of Jews compare with those of persons of other faiths?
- How would Americans today answer Jesus' question: "Who do you say that I am?"
- Does the "electronic church" replace traditional worship?
- What is the impact of the college years on the religious beliefs and practices of students?

In 1989 we shall continue to address such questions with current surveys. Be sure to renew your subscription today — the price will remain at only $30 per year (for 10 issues).

How To Reach The Unchurched American

Millions of Americans remain unchurched, and many churches are continuing to experience losses in membership. What can be done to reach the unchurched American? How can present members be kept in the fold?

New light is shed on these pressing questions by the results of a just-completed major survey of the nation's adults, THE UNCHURCHED AMERICAN — 1988. The focus of this survey is on the factors that cause people to leave the church — and those that cause them to return.

This survey, which reports updates of many of the questions asked in the landmark survey of a decade ago (THE UNCHURCHED AMERICAN, 1978), compares and contrasts the attitudes of the churched and unchurched on social changes, lifestyle factors, basic religious beliefs and many other factors that are related to churchlessness.

Special attention in this 1988 survey has been given to the religious experience and needs of blacks and Hispanics in the United States.

The report, based on this important survey, provides full statistical details, comparisons with 1978 results, as well as a special section which offers practical steps to reach the unchurched in your community.

For good, solid, practical information that can help YOU in YOUR ministry — both in reaching new people and in deepening the commitment of the present members of your church — write for the new report, THE UNCHURCHED AMERICAN — 1988.

To place your order write: The Princeton Religion Research Center, P.O. Box 628, Princeton, NJ 08542. Cost per copy is $29.00.

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